

Preface

Following on from the effects of COVID-19 and its disruptions to the teaching, learning and assessment within higher education nationally, and indeed, globally, this volume of the *Alternation African Scholarship Book Series* (AASBS) focuses on assessments using digital platforms during the time of COVID-19. The digital platform was the major technology that allowed the academic enterprise, and especially assessment, to continue during the pandemic period. Having produced seven volumes of the book series on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, this additional volume shifts the focus to assessment within higher education and engages with academic staff's accounts of their experiences and insights using digital platforms for assessment. So, the chapters in this volume emerged from experiences across South African and regional institutions of higher learning, which were shared at a colloquium hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities in 2021. As such, the volume, therefore, also wishes to contribute to the missing element in the triad of teaching, learning and assessment.

Noting the impacts of COVID-19 on the Higher Education sector, at all levels, and the publication of the mentioned seven volumes of the AASBS, a gap related to assessment was noted in the series. This volume, therefore attempts to address this gap by contributing to the discourse and debates on digital platforms beyond the centrally focused matter of the continuation of teaching and learning using digital media, during the pandemic. While digital platforms for assessment has been used in the past, the grand scale rapid introduction of assessment using digital platforms warranted a capture of the first experiences and impressions of academics who, many of them, have used these platforms for the very first time. This volume, then, captures some of these experiences, views and theorisations of their rapid transitions to using digital platforms, to conduct their assessments for their respective modules.

The research produced and published through the AASBS, and also the participants in this project, provide a space, and academic leadership, for the critical assessment and related planning associated with the acceleration of academia into the digital era. This volume, under the excellent leadership of Labby Ramrathan, Ruth Hoskins and Veena Singaram, is significantly contributing to this unfolding and growing scholarship on higher education teaching, learning and assessment. Under the leadership, the volume importantly

brings to the fore some of the key issues and considerations for the future developments of research on the utilisation of digital platforms in tertiary assessment studies. And while COVID-19 formed the broad-based globally complex space in terms of which this research focus originated, the sheer speed in terms of which academia, and all its branches of study and research, accelerated into the digital, online, cyber or virtual age confronts us with both opportunities and challenges. So, as tertiary education accelerates from this point forward, in this newly-founded space, we will certainly also have to think through the optimal uses of digital technologies, in coming unfolding contexts and times.

Education beyond the pandemic, and especially with the primary objectives to deliver the highest levels and quality of education, research and assessments to even the most remote areas of our country, continent and planet, has certainly profoundly gained through the development and applied uses of new teaching and learning and research software and technologies. And, given the huge role that the whatsapp app has played in South Africa and Africa in this regard, we may just imagine the role apps will also play in research-led teaching and learning in future. It is our sincere hope that the related possibilities will also play a central role in how the Humanities and Social Sciences apps of the future, will transformatively impact the wellbeing and the improvement of the quality of life of communities. We hope that individuals and communities benefitting from online education will then not only benefit through their access to and experiences of excellent education, but also internationally benchmarked assessments, qualifications, and capabilities development. We also hope that it will also benefit both the quality and quantity of future contextually-relevant African scholarship research outputs in South Africa, and abroad, and so, contribute to the growing and advancing the profile of the AASBS, as well as knowledge formation and development in the disciplines articulated with research in Higher Education Studies.

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